

UNDER DEVELOPMENT

Camp David

David Robinson is determined to enjoy a relaxing holiday abroad, but he winds up grappling with a wonky WiFi connection and struggling to crack the language barrier

It's been quite a month for messing about with WiFi links. The Sony Vaio conking out was a nuisance (*Under Development*, Shopper October/November 2007), not least because the configuration software for my home router, a US Robotics 9109, was on it. The problem is that when the router is turned on or restarted, the wireless functions don't work. In the past, I used the software on the Vaio to go to the appropriate menu selection and switch the WiFi back on.

Why not run the software from the USB hard disk taken out of the Vaio? Well, I tried that, but it won't run. It's probably looking for Registry entries that no longer exist. It's yet another argument against the Windows Registry, one of the daftest ideas ever. Configuration files in a folder local to the application are far more flexible.

Why not use the configuration software built into the router? It's accessed by simply typing the IP address into a normal web browser, logging in as 'admin' and entering the password. Well, I would do that but, strangely, it has no features for handling the wireless functions, even though it's a wireless router. It looks almost exactly like the PC-based program, but the WiFi bits are not there.

Why not install the software on the Tosh? Well, I would if I could find the bloody CD. I went through the mountains of CDs that I've accumulated and there was no sign of it, so I downloaded a version from the US Robotics website. The Tosh has a regular RJ45 Ethernet connection and the router has four wired ports, so that was no trouble. The problem is that the downloaded software won't install. I start the setup program, which loads the software and then searches for the router – which it can't find. This is odd, because that was the router used to download the software in the first place. The install routine says that, because it can't find the router, it's going to abort. So I end up going round and round in circles.

SUPPORT ACT

I sent an email to US Robotics support explaining the problem.



Three days later, I got a standard reply via the supposedly non-existent router that just reiterated the whole setup procedure outlined in the manual and on the website. This included the helpful "Step 3. Install EasyConfigurator". Don't these people actually read the description of the problem?

I suspect that the problem lies with the router's IP address, which can be changed to anything you like. Its out-of-the-box address is 192.168.1.1 and I've changed it to 10.0.9.1, which is perfectly legal and fits the numbering system we use on our networks. The router obviously works well enough set up that way. My hypothesis is that the install routine looks for 192.168.1.1 without taking into account the actual IP address. If that's true, the answer would be to change the router back to 192.168.1.1 temporarily then change it back afterwards. However, with my holiday departure date rushing relentlessly towards me, I didn't have time to experiment.

RANGE ROVING

When I arrived at the holiday site in the south of France, I found they had a WiFi service. This was nice because it saved me the daily trudge over to the marina to get in range of the wireless hot spot there. At least, it was nice while it worked.

I'd collected email every day, having bought three hours' worth of connection time for 18 euros. After two weeks, I still had half the pre-paid logon time left. Then we had a

few days away from the site at Les Gorges de Verdon. I'm trekking up to Everest Base Camp in October and had a new pair of walking boots that needed breaking in, so some walks in the mountains seemed like a good idea.

On returning to the campsite, I found I couldn't get the Tosh to connect. Normally, after firing up Firefox, you get the WiFi France logon screen first, no matter what you try to connect to. But I didn't. Running IPConfig confirmed that I had connected to the local router so the WiFi was working, but browsing the net or making a VPN connection was impossible.

Until then, the Tosh WiFi had worked perfectly and I could get a nice strong signal anywhere within 100 metres of the kids' play park and the Bar du Tennis, which was where the antenna was located. I had toyed with the idea of experimenting with an external high-gain aerial to try to increase the range but, like most laptops, it has no provision for connecting one and the cost of a PCMCIA card with such a connector is prohibitive. The choice of cards is pretty narrow, too. As there's a bloody great hill between our place and the Tennis Bar, the experiment looked unlikely to bear fruit, so I didn't bother.

A visit to the camp office was ineffectual. "Voir Bar du Tennis," was the not-too-promising advice. Unpromising, because the only person there was a girl behind the bar with big boobs, a belly-button full of bling and a matching pair of

age and IQ. She looked about 18. Now, my French is not too bad – I can order food, drinks and have animated conversations punctuated with sign language with my mate Hubert (pronounced 'Hew-bear') from Strasbourg. But explaining to Miss Brain of France that her DHCP service was working OK but external routing wasn't promised to be a tall order.

BONJOUR, MANGE TOUT

Still, I tried. And was met with blank look and a shrug. "Qu'est ce que c'est WiFi?" she asked. "L'internet par radio," I ventured. Another blank look, another shrug.

At that point, Dave Five Bellies walked past. He's 50, still flogging drinks on the beach and still determinedly pursuing his career as a prospective rock star. His band had a gig at the tennis bar that night, and he was lugging a not-inconsiderable amount of kit around to a small stage beside the bar. All the lugging, plus the fact that he's stopped drinking alcohol, means the name's no longer appropriate and he's down to just three bellies.

Having lived in France for 30 years, his French is just a bit better than mine, albeit still with a strong Mancunian accent, so he intercedes. Now, in all languages very subtle changes can make a lot of difference to the meaning, as amply demonstrated by the undercover English gendarme in 'Allo 'Allo! who was always "pissing by the door". My pronunciation, it seems, is causing the confusion.

"Ah, le wee-fee!" she exclaimed, and opened a door revealing a room that looked like a mini internet café where a row of dead PCs have signs saying 'En Panne' sellotaped across the screens. "Fry tag," she says.

"Fry tag? The tag got fried? What tag?" I ask Dave.

"No, you wally," Dave says. "It'll be fixed on Friday. Your accent's that good, she thinks that you're a German!" ☺

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